

# Steward Notes

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UNION STEWARDS ARE THE FRONT LINE OF DEFENCE FOR UNION MEMBERS IN THE WORKPLACE. STEWARDS PLAY ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ROLES IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT.



## Workplace Mobilization

It's easy for stewards to get focused on grievances alone, but a good steward knows that you shouldn't wait to react to problems. Having a plan for workplace mobilization is important for bargaining, to identify and develop new activists, or when action is needed on an issue of importance to the union as whole. Here are a few things to keep in mind to help you mobilize your co-workers.

### Communication is the key

Most workplaces have some space set aside for posting union information. But tacking up a poster now and again is just a first step if you really want to activate your workplace. Some workers may not see the bulletin board regularly enough

and employer restrictions on accessing worksites may not make it a good way to communicate timely information.

A personal touch in a face-to-face conversation, phone call or email could engage members who would otherwise pass over the latest posting all too easily. Communication is essential in mobilizing your workplace, and regular email and phone calls ensure that you are always getting in touch with people when you need to.

Introducing yourself to new members is also a vital way to put a face to the union right from the outset. Some contracts provide for on-the-clock union orientation time for new hires, so make sure you are taking advantage of that

by Merryn Edwards  
Communications Staff

# Workplace Mobilization *Continued*

provision if you've got it. If not, be sure to make some time on a break to say hi and exchange contact information so you can follow up later.

## Connect your co-workers to the broader union

Even if you're not in the thick of bargaining, there are lots of opportunities to keep in touch with your co-workers. A phone call about an upcoming Chapter BBQ or an email urging your coworkers to speak out to protect their pensions not only helps to educate and activate your co-workers, it also provides an excuse to keep in touch on a regular basis. Those conversations help build relationships and solidarity that you can draw on during tough times, and they can help make people feel comfortable about bringing forward issues that they otherwise might have kept to themselves.

Encourage your co-workers to keep in touch with union headquarters on their own as well and get the most out of membership. The AUPE website

([www.aupe.org](http://www.aupe.org)) contains a wealth of information about the activities of the union and issues of importance to members. You can also use the website to update your contact information and ensure that you don't miss receiving updates that affect you. Email is the best way to receive timely information, but make sure you include your personal email since your work email may carry some restrictions.

## One activist for every 10 workers

Especially in larger workplaces, developing activists is a key part of effective workplace mobilization. No steward can do it alone, no matter how hardworking and enthusiastic. A good rule of thumb is to aim for one activist out every ten workers. Activists can help with phone tree calling, emailing or any other time-consuming activity that a steward may need help with.

The key to developing activists is to give them achievable tasks so that they can build confidence through successes. Make sure you don't overwhelm people with too

much information and responsibility right off the bat. Younger workers who are just starting out in their careers may need more encouragement. But the effort you put in to mentoring activists will pay off when you need it most.



**ya** Young Activists Committee

THE SKY IS THE LIMIT  
WHEN YOUTH GETS INVOLVED

## Developing young activists

Engaging younger members can sometimes be challenging. Those under 30 have unique needs, concerns and expectations in the workplace. But effectively engaging this demographic can bring forth fresh ideas and perspectives and help ensure successful union campaigns.

AUPE's Young Activists Committee (YAC) works to build connections with AUPE members who are 30 years old and younger. YAC provides a forum to discuss issues affecting young workers, encourages their participation within AUPE and hosts engagement events that are tailored toward a younger audience. YAC events include an annual charity slow-pitch tournament, a biennial conference, and worksite lunch & mingle sessions. They also present the Recognition of Activism Leadership for Youth (RALY) award at every Convention.

YAC is always looking to join Local meetings & events at various worksites to help current stewards and worksite contacts engage and mobilize your younger co-workers. Consider inviting YAC to your next event. Email [yac@aupe.ca](mailto:yac@aupe.ca) or look for AUPE Young Activists on Facebook.



# HAVE QUESTIONS?

**CONTACT YOUR MEMBER SERVICES OFFICER**

## CALL 1-800-232-7284

Have your local/chapter number and worksite location ready so your call can be directed quickly.





# Stress, duty to accommodate and return to work plans

Returning to work after an injury or illness can be stressful. A clear return to work plan can help to proactively manage stress and prevent further problems.

by Merryn Edwards  
Communications Staff

We all talk about stress, but we are not always clear about exactly what it is. Stress is not a medical disorder, although it can be a factor in other medical conditions. As a result, stress on its own, and the conflicts at work that can stem from stress, are not a basis for the duty to accommodate.

Nevertheless, the guidelines can become blurred, especially when a return to work plan is put in place after an absence due to mental illness. And even if stress was not a factor in the disability that led to accommodation, returning to work after any illness or injury can be stressful.

The tripartite responsibility—shared by the employer, the employee, and the union—in the area of duty to accommodate means that each party has an obligation to help proactively manage stress that may arise.

## A clear return to work plan can help to prevent and manage stress

Return to work plans must be based on medically objective information. Doctors advising about the scope of duties that

can or cannot be performed should limit themselves to outlining the restrictions that are required. They should not offer opinions about what kind of return to work plan is appropriate. Comments such as “transfer to another work area may decrease stress” are too vague to hold water if challenged by the employer, even if they come from a medical professional.

Try to anticipate any aspects of the job that may create difficulties in returning to work and be sure that they are included in the medical documentation. For example, if shift work is an issue, the documentation would have to specify the number and range of appropriate working hours.

An effective return to work plan should also clearly outline the length of time it will be in place and the date on which it will be reviewed. When the plan is reviewed, any changes made should again be based on medically objective information. Even in cases where the

disability is expected to be permanent, periodic review can help to make sure the return to work plan is appropriate and help to forestall any potential problems.

## Understanding the tripartite responsibility

Employers, employees and union representatives all have a role to play in ensuring a successful return to work. A good return to work plan should act as a guide to outlining those responsibilities.

Make sure that the return to work plan meets the following criteria:

- It is put in writing
- It is based on medically objective information
- It includes the date(s) when it will be reviewed
- It is realistic

Once such a plan is in place, each party is responsible for upholding it. Make sure your members understand that failure to comply with their return to work plan may result in discipline.



# Learning Changing Growing

## AUPE's core course scheduling has changed to serve you better

AUPE has streamlined the core course scheduling process to make getting your union education easier. Our new process makes our core courses more convenient, flexible and most importantly reliable.

Now the courses will be offered as soon as enough people are registered to take them, with the most convenient location chosen based on where the majority of registrants live.

Any member can take the *Introduction to your Union* and *Contract Interpretation* courses. Other courses are reserved for Union Stewards and Officers.

### To take your union education further:

- 1) **Go online.** [www.aupe.org/member-resources/education/](http://www.aupe.org/member-resources/education/)
- 2) **Choose.** Find a course.
- 3) **Register.** Registration begins August 18. Call 1-800-232-7284 and ask to speak with the course registration desk.
- 4) **Confirm.** Once a course has met the required numbers, a location will be chosen based on the postal codes of registered members and you will be contacted with the date and location.

Steward Notes is published by the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees to provide information of technical interest to AUPE Union Stewards, worksite contacts and other members. Topics deal with training for union activists, worksite issues, disputes and arbitrations, health and safety, trends in labour law, bargaining and related material. For more information, contact the editor.

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The goal of Steward Notes is to help today's AUPE Union Stewards do their jobs effectively. To help us, we encourage readers to submit story ideas that deserve exposure among all AUPE stewards.

Story suggestions for Steward Notes may be submitted for consideration to Communications Staff Writer Tyler Bedford by e-mail at [t.bedford@aupe.org](mailto:t.bedford@aupe.org) or by mail. Please include names and contact information for yourself and potential story sources.

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